AN

ESSAY,

Concerning

Critical and Curious Learning:

In which are contained

Some Short Reflections on the Controversie betwixt

Sir *WILLIAM TEMPLE*

AND

Mr. *WOTTON*;

And that betwixt

Dr. *BENTLEY*

AND

Mr. *BOYL*.

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AN ESSAY, Concerning CRITICAL AND Curious Learning.

SIR,

IF I am at all capable of undertaking your Commands, it is wholly owing to the Advantage of that Converse you

have for ſome time Honoured me with: But would you be prevailed upon, to lay aſide your Authority over me, I could aſſign the Province to a much more skilfull Hand; I could wiſh you would rather have Inſtructed me your-ſelf upon thoſe Points you have offered to my Conſideration, than to exact the little I am able to ſay upon them. However, in order to begin that Correſpondence betwixt us, which your Letter ſo kindly propoſes, and which is ſo much for my own Benefit; I will here give my Imperfect Thoughts upon your firſt Queſtion, *viz.*

Whether

Whether Critical and Curious Enquiries are really Conducive to the advancement of ſolid and uſeful Learning, or not?

together with my Opinion in general of the Controverſie betwixt Sir *William Temple* and Mr. *Wotton*, and that betwixt Dr. *Bentley* and Mr. *Boyl*. This I ſhall only do, ſo far as it will come within the Compaſs and Form of a Letter; for I am not at all inclined to engage in a ſet Methodical Diſcourſe.

Tho' the Negative ſide of this Queſtion may hold very well, if applyed to ſome ſuperficial *Wits* and pretended *Virtuoſi*

in the World; yet it can never be ſupported againſt thoſe learned *Antients* and *Moderns*, that are juſtly diſtinguiſhed by the Name of *Criticks*. For to them we owe what is truly Curious and Entertaining in Philoſophy; and to them we muſt attribute all thoſe admirable Refinements in the Liberal Arts and Sciences. For had not the Cenſors of former Times been able, by their great Knowledge of Nature and Reaſon, to refute the many crude indigeſted Hypotheſes, which frequently were advanced in *Athens* and *Rome*; what whimſical Inventions had Sophiſters impoſed upon the more unletter'd ſort of People, and tranſmitted down to Poſterity, for rare Syſtems and unuſual heights in Philoſophy? and had not the Criticks

of latter Ages, when Learning after a long and dark Interval began to dawn and revive again in *Europe*, been very industrious in Publishing correct Editions of antient Books, and putting Modern Authors upon great Care and exactness in their Writings, that they might at last restore Letters to the World, we had not at this day seen Learning in so flourishing a Condition, nor so many Academies, and places of Polite Literature, where Men are wholly set apart for the Cultivation of Knowledge.

There are indeed some Studies, wherein a Scrutinous Curiosity is altogether impertinent and ridiculous; as when we would busie our Thoughts about things that can neither re-

form our Morals, nor enlighten our Understandings, when we either sink them to mean and frivolous Niceties, or raise them to secret unknowable Disquisitions. And yet these two Extreams have strangely engaged many great Men.

Simonides (we are told) undertook to give a positive Definition of the Nature and Essence of *GOD* : But he soon found his imperfect Capacity could frame no adequate Conceptions of him, no Descriptions, but what were purely Negative. *Aristotle*, and many other Philosophers, attempted the Solution of several abstruse Phœnomena in Nature ; which we have cause to believe by their bad Success, is beyond the scanty power

power of Humane Reaſon. And our Modern Philoſophers and Divines are every day raiſeing new Hypotheſes, and ſeem reſolved to unfold all the Myſteries of Religion. But after all their ſubtle reaſonings and labour'd Diſputes, they will find no better Effects of their Studies than Uncertainty and Confuſion. For tho' in Juſtice to our ſelves we ought to entertain great and worthy Idea's of the excellency of Humane Reaſon; yet Experience teaches us, that it is bounded and limitted in many reſpects, that it is ſhort and imperfect in its Deductions, even in thoſe things that are more immediately within its compaſs. Why then ſhould ſome Men be ſo fond of Speculations, which the wiſer

ſer part of Mankind have concluded above their Knowledge, and which they themſelves muſt confeſs to be nothing better than *Learned Amuſements?*

As to the other Extream; I am ſo far from admiring thoſe great Men, that have taken wonderful Pains about little inſignificant things, as in traceing the riſe and progreſs of *Words*; and have written Volumes concerning particular *Letters*; that I think they miſerably loſt their time; and ſo will any one that reads their Works upon theſe Subjects: Whatever can be ſaid upon them is not worth knowing. The Authors indeed may flatter themſelves with the Thoughts of ſome New Diſcoveries or hidden Secrets; but the

the World will never grow wiſer for ſuch Labours. We ſhall not underſtand the Noble Expreſſions and Proprieties of *Homer*, nor the Style and Genius of *Thucydides* at all the better, for being nicely skill'd in the Chronology of the Greek Tongue; or for knowing how many Letters *Cadmus* firſt found out, and by what Degrees the Alphabet, as we now have it, was compleated. Theſe are frivolous Curioſities, fit only for Pedants and School-maſters to amuſe their Boys withall; and are wholly Forreign to the acquiſition of ſolid and real Knowledge.

But there are however many kinds of Learning, wherein Curious and Critical Obſervations are

are very commendable, and are doubtleſs Noble Exerciſes of Humane Underſtanding. And of all ſuch Studies, methinks that of *Experimental Philoſophy* is the moſt noble, beneficial, and ſatisfactory. For the Mind is not there ſeduced with abſtracted Arguments and Chymerical Notions; but is determined by Demonſtration and Matter of Fact. It is the great Inſtrument by which ſuch admirable Effects in Nature have been diſcovered, and from whence the conſtituent Principles of all mixed Bodies are beſt known, and thoſe Nice Speculations of Phyloſophy ſo excellently grounded. But even this Science, however deſirable and entertaining in it ſelf to an inquiſitive Genius, may be proſecuted to a great

great absurdity: As when Men carry on their Experiments to the Land of the *Moon*; contrive *Aerial Engines* for our passage thither; and teach the Learned to fly as familiarly as others walk: When they are resolved to refine so far upon all former Inventions, as to advance New Impossibilities, and instead of improveing useful *Navigation*, will propose Methods for Ships sailing under Water, and such like Contradictions to Nature. These, I must confess, are Projections that turn upon too subtle and deep Reasons for my comprehension. Others have discovered by the help of their Glasses, that those Insects which are almost invisible to a Naked Eye, have however as distinct parts as we have; and

and that a *Louſe*, compared to thoſe liveing Atoms, is a Creature of a monſtrous ſize. There are yet others; who not only undertake to trace Nature in all her Operations, but will pretend to rival her Works, and produce the ſame Effects from Artificial Cauſes. But when Chymiſts, ſetting up for *Adepti*, forget their uſeful Experiments, and begin to hunt after the *Philoſophers-Stone*; when they talk of nothing but their *Diana*, their *Quinteſſence* and their *ſecret Phyſical Matter*: When, I ſay, they are once ſo beſotted as to have theſe Whimſies in their Head, and to expend their Health, Labour, and Money, in digging for an imaginary Mine in *Fairy Ground*; we may reaſonably Conclude them in the High Road to Poverty

verty and Confuſion. I wonder indeed, how Men of Senſe can be taken with thoſe Improbabilities, ſome *Chymical Authors* impoſe upon their Readers: I mean, thoſe Stories about the Vaſt Quantities of Gold made their Mighty *Elixir* or *Tranſmuting Powder*; to which they aſcribe little leſs than a kind of Divinity and Omnipotence. I have read in ſome of their late Books, that it is Authentically recorded, that *Ripley*, an *Engliſh Adeptus*, ſent for many Years ſucceſſively an Hundred Thouſand Pounds of *Artificial Gold* to the *Knights of Rhodes*, to maintain the War againſt the *Turks*: And that *Raymund Lully*, another *Adeptus*, furniſhed *Edward* the Firſt with ſix Myriads of the ſame Mettal, to carry on the *Holy War* in the *Holy Land*. Beſides,

ſides, I have read a great many Tales of Covents, Monaſteries, Hoſpitals, and other Works of Charity, which have been privately founded at the Expence of the *Adepti*. But a Man muſt be arrived at Dotage, before he believes this Cant: It can have no better Credit ſure with any thinking Perſon, than a fictitious Narrative in a Romance.

To be well skill'd in *Chronology* is looked upon as a great and neceſſary piece of Learning. For this Science only gives us a diſtinct View of the Succeſſive Order of things from the firſt Accounts of time: It determines and divides the Periods of the moſt conſiderable Tranſactions of paſt Ages; which

which *History* does not oblige it self to, being chiefly imployed in representing the Causes Vicissitudes and Events of them; in letting us into the true resorts and intrinsick Contextures of publick and private Negotiations; and conveying down such Notices and Observations from Antiquity, as may be of Service in the Conduct of all future Occurrences in Humane Life. And therefore without *Chronology* we should have but an imperfect knowledge of one of the most useful and pleasant Studies in the World. But I could never understand the use or pleasure of that everlasting Contention some Writers have raised amongst themselves, about small Punctilio's

and Niceties; wherein perchance they are much concerned to discover whether *Homer* or *Hesiod* did really live first; to know what Day and Hour such a *King* or *Consul* dyed. These little Questions have seem'd so very important, that the World has been troubled with whole Volumes about them; and after all, the Quarrel ends as it begun. I am as much at a loss too to know the worth of that hidden and remote Knowledge, *Antiquaries* so much value themselves upon. It is at best but Uncertain and Conjectural, being drawn out of defaced *Monuments, Coins, Inscriptions, Calendars, Traditions, Archives, Fragments*, and scattered passages of lost Books.

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Theſe Men however put an higher Eſteem on ſuch Treaſures, (as they call them) than on all the ſolid and beneficial Studies a Man can apply himſelf to. To diſcern the Year of a ruſted Medal, or the Date of a Moth-eaten Manuſcript, is in their account a greater piece of Learning, than to be acquainted with the Life and Actions of that Emperour whoſe Image the Coin bears, or to underſtand the Style and Matter of the Book it ſelf. Perhaps the one kind of Knowledge may coſt as much Pains and Labour as the other; but that only proves their Folly more ridiculous and unpardonable.

Grammar is a Science, that is introductory and ſubſervient to moſt others, and is abſolutely Neceſſary for a Scholar to be well verſed in. Without it we could have no acquaintance with the *Dead Tongues*, from whence is drawn all, or the beſt part at leaſt of the Learning now in the World. But I need not endeavour to point out the particular Uſes of it, as it is applied to Antient or Modern Languages, and examines the Idiotiſms and Proprieties of them, and lays down Rules, by which they may be more ſpeedily learned, and more correctly ſpoken: Every body is well enough acquainted with them, and I know who I am writing

to. But Grammar, as it handles thoſe Grounds and Rules that belong to the Philoſophy of Letters, in order to frame a New and Univerſal Language, wherein every word is a Deſcription of the thing it ſignifies; is of a vaſter extent, and takes in the whole Theory of Nature. To conſider the Analogy between words and things, is no doubt a very entertaining Speculation; and it would be a means to reconcile the two diſtinguiſhing Characters of Humane Nature, *Speech* and *Reaſon*. But I believe thoſe few learned Authors that have treated of it, rather propoſed their own private Satisfaction, than any publick Advantage to Mankind. Not to mention others,

Dr. *Wilkins's Eſſay towards a real Character*, is a Book of great Learning, and is juſtly admired by all that have read and underſtood it. But it is like thoſe Noble Schemes and Models, that are too fine and exquiſite to be put in practice. And I may venture to ſay, (but with due Reſpect to this and other Learned Authors, who have placed it among their *Deſiderata*) *That a Philoſophical Grammer* is at this time as Uſeleſs as a *Mechanical one* is Neceſſary.

There is another Study, which is of admirable Uſe and Ornament, and that is *Aſtronomy*. But when Men miſtake the End and Deſign of this too, and inſtead of underſtanding the

the Natural Motions and Situations of the Heavenly Bodies, with reſpect to the Earth, will undertake to give an account of Planetary Influences and Impreſſions, to Calculate Nativities, to graſp at and anticipate future things, as if they had not enough to do to digeſt the preſent: It then becomes a vain and fruitleſs Impertinence. The common Argument in favour of Aſtrology is, that ſince we are aſſured by Experience it ſelf that *Solſtices*, *Æquinoctials*, *New Moons*, *Full Moons*, and the like greater Revolutions of the Stars do manifeſtly Operate upon Natural Bodies, it muſt needs follow, that the more exact and ſubtle Aſpect of the Planets ſhould produce Effects

more exquiſite and occult, and open a very ample Field to Humane Obſervation. But this is precariouſly affirmed, and as weakly applyed. For the greater and more apparent Influences of the Cœleſtial Bodies are only known to us by meer Conjecture; and if ſo, what Hopes can Humane Inquiry have of diſcovering their more ſubtle occult qualities, or collecting any certain Conſequences from them? *Horace* ſays admirably well,

Prudens futuri temporis exitum
Caliginoſâ nocte premit Deus,
Ridetque ſi mortalis ultrà
Fas trepidat.

Which

Which Conſideration, as well as many others, ought to check the Preſumption of thoſe, who pretend to a ſecret Intelligence from above, and an Immediate Correſpondence with Heaven. This is nevertheleſs, a Study which ſome Men think worth their Care; and if at laſt they attain to the Reputation of an *Almanack-maker* or *Conjurer*, they are abundantly ſatisfied with the Worthy Diſtinction.

There are yet other Sciences, as *Geometry* and *Metaphyſicks*; which in ſome Degrees are extreamly uſeful and neceſſary. For without this great Branch of *Mathematicks*, many parts of Na-

Nature could never be fully comprehended, nor clearly demonſtrated, nor accommodated to uſe with any Skill or Certainty. And without *Metaphyſicks*, what Notion could we have of that vaſt Circle of Knowledge beyond the Sphere of Matter and Motion, which is converſant about Spirits and Incorporeal Subſtances? But I ſhould not deſire to be a Profound Critick in them. Becauſe, the greateſt Acquirements, that could be hoped for, would hardly compenſate the infinite Pains a Man muſt beſtow upon them. Not but that I believe *Mathematicks* afford as ſubſtantial a pleaſure to thoſe, who are wholly addicted to them, as any other Humane Knowledge

ledge whatever. And ſo do *Metaphyſicks* too; if we believe the Story of the Famous *Avicen*, who is ſaid to have been ſo raviſhed with *Ariſtotle's Metaphyſicks*, that upon his firſt Underſtanding of them, he beſtowed large Summs of Money on the Poor, out of the abundance of his Joy and Gratitude; and had the patience to read them over forty times, and get them all by Heart. But, I ſay, however, I can never be perſwaded, that it is worth any Man's while to dedicate his Time and Thoughts to thoſe Abſtracted Idea's and Theorems in theſe Knowledges the Learned ſo much Talk of. This kind of Pleaſure is too Exquiſite and Refined for the Taſte of the preſent Age; and

we now adays think it no Reflection upon our Underſtandings, to profeſs our Neglect and Ignorance of it. The bent of theſe Times is for Politer Studies.

And therefore *Critical Learning*, in the Modern Acception, is commonly taken for a thorough Underſtanding of Claſſick Authors, and an Exact Knowledge of thoſe Rules, by which Men judge and determine nicely of all the finer Parts and Branches of Humane Literature. *Ariſtotle* was the firſt that drew theſe Rules up into Compaſs, and made Criticiſm an Art; and the Philoſopher took ſuch Care to form his Precepts upon the Practice of the beſt Writers, and

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to reduce them withal to the ſevereſt Teſt of Nature and Reaſon; that he ſcarcely left any thing for ſucceeding Ages to do. We find little or nothing in *Horace*, and the admirable Fragments of *Longinus*, but what he had in a great meaſure lay'd down before. The Modern Criticks drain all their Notions from this great Source and Fountain: And tho' later *Syſtems* have endeavoured to explode his Philoſophy; yet I find no Reflections on his Criticks, but what are likely to perpetuate that Eſteem and Value the World has all along had for them. But in ſhort, he is eſteemed a good Critick, who can diſtinguiſh the Beauties and Excellencies of an Author; and

diſcover

discover likewise his Failures and Imperfections. When he makes his Judgment of a Book; he takes it in pieces, and considers the whole Structure and Oeconomy of it; What Connexion and Dependance there is between one Part or Argument and another; whether all Material Circumstances are fully touched upon; whether any thing less remarkable is too far spun out, and dilated. Then he proceeds to a Consideration of the Style; how that is suited and accommodated to the Nature of the things it treats of; how the Language is worked together and digested; how the Figures and Proprieties of Speech are used. And here we see a Critick in this sense has a vast

Room

Room and Scope for his Obſervations, wherein he may ſhew his Judgment and Learning; and be very Inſtrumental in the Propagation of Arts and Sciences.

But it is ſometimes urged againſt Criticiſm, that too regular an adherence to the Forms and Meaſures of it, is a Reſtraint upon a Writers Invention, and does more harm than good in Compoſition. For that the Imagination cannot ſo freely diffuſe and expand it ſelf, when it is obliged to any Bounds or Limits whatever. Which Argument is ſometimes illuſtrated and ſupported by that Famous Example of an Ungovernable Genius in Heroick Vertue, I mean that of *Alexander the Great*; whoſe

whoſe Vaſt Ambition never failed to hurry him beyond the due Meaſures of Conduct: Upon which very Account, (ſay they) his Exploits had always ſomething in them wonderfully Surprizing and Aſtoniſhing. Whereas *Cæſar*'s Actions, that were more Cool, Deliberate and Proportioned to the Rules of Prudence and Policy, never give us ſuch an Exalted Sublime Idea of his Fortitude as we muſt neceſſarily entertain of the *Greek* Hero's. The Friends too of our great Dramatick Writer, *Shakeſpear*, will not be perſwaded, but that even his Monſtrous Irregularities were conducive to thoſe Shining Beauties, which abound in moſt of his Plays; and that if he had been

more

more a Critick, he had been leſs a Poet. But, I ſay, notwithſtanding this; good Conduct in War is no hindrance to the boldeſt Undertakings. For any one that knows Hiſtory, knows that if *Cæſar* had neglected it, his Atchievements had never been ſo glorious, nor *Alexander*'s neither. Thoſe *aſtoniſhing* (I might call them accidental) Victories, which the latter gained, betrayed (many of them at leaſt) more of Foolhardineſs than Valour. And a due Obſervation of Critical Rules, that is, a ſtrict attendance to the Rules of Nature and Reaſon, can never impede or clog an Author's Fancy; but rather produce and enlarge it. They may as well urge,

that good and wholesome *Laws*, which enjoyn nothing but what a Rational Nature would otherwise oblige us to, take away the Liberty of Mankind; whereas they are the very Life and Security of it.

Now I am nameing Invention and Composition, I cannot but reflect on the Use and Advantage of a frequent application to them. Which is another Argument in Favour of your Proposals; and you will therefore Pardon a short digression upon this Head.

It was the Opinion (you know, *Sir*,) of one of the greatest Men of Antiquity, that all Knowledge was but *Reminiscence*,

niſcence, and that it was innate in the Soul, tho' obſcured and darkened by our groſſer part more or leſs, according to the particular Diſpoſition and Temperament of the Body. The allowance of which Principle would doubtleſs teach us, that to exert theſe Original Seeds of Science, we muſt often uſe and ſtretch our Intellectual Powers. For thus the Mind would as it were dilate it ſelf, and by degrees correct the Tone and Habitude of the Organs. But whether there be any Truth in the Philoſophers Doctrine or no, this is moſt certain, that all the Faculties of the Mind, both active and paſſive, are mightily heightened and improved by Exerciſe. But if they are neg-

lected and unimployed, they will ſhrink and contract themſelves, and be unable to anſwer their proper Functions. Which (as the Experiments of our Modern *Virtuoſi* have plainly demonſtrated) is true alſo as to ſome Properties of inanimate Bodies. Our *Reaſon*, which is an Active Principle, would, if for ſome time ſtifled and ſuppreſſed, in a great meaſure looſe that Sagacity and Acuteneſs implanted in it. The *Memory*, which is more perceptive and paſſive, could neither retain nor return thoſe Idea's and Images recommended to it, unleſs it were often proved and examined. It would have but a very Dark and Unfaithful Conception of Things, unleſs we ſometimes recollected

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and produced our Notions. If we never Committed our Thoughts to Writing, the *Invention* would become faint and ſluggiſh for want of breathing; and the *Judgment* could never determine aright of that huddled perplexed *Chaos* of Knowledge, or rather Ignorance, we ſhould have within us.

It is the Condition and Circumſtance of Humane Nature, under its preſent Depreſſion, to acquire Science but by Steps and Gradations. The Conveyances to our Underſtanding, are too groſs to be conſiſtent with an immediate Intuition, which is the Happineſs and Prerogative of Spiritual Intelligences only: Whereas the Mind of Man takes Impreſſions from External

Objects; and these Impressions make her reflect upon the Nature of the thing, from whence she receives them, leading us through a long Chain and Series of Thoughts before we can arrive at any Conclusions. Now in Order to bring these Conclusions to some Clearness and Perfection, we must often ruminate upon them, we must turn our Thoughts into Words and Expressions; and thus we shall instruct and inform the very Mind that produces them, by putting it still upon a more intense Application. For we doubtless understand our selves better by expressing the Idea we have formed within, than we possibly can by Private Thoughts and Internal Reflections, which are always

always a little dark and cloudy. The Image becomes more clear and determinate, when it is ſet in open Light, and is, as it were, a ſecond time ſubmitted to the Cenſure of the Mind. We cannot ſo eaſily flatter our ſelves with falſe Beauties and Appearances. Our Judgments will reform the Miſtakes our Vanity might before have fondly entertained, and give us a juſter and more exact View of our Abilties. Thus we ſhall underſtand the real Compaſs and Circle of our Knowledge: We ſhall digeſt and ſettle what we have already imbibed, and be the better able to proceed to further Improvements. We ſhall diſcover our own Natural Infirmities or Defects,

and consequently may learn to apply proper Remedies and Reliefs to them.

It has been a Controverted Question in Philosphy, *An omnes animæ sint æquales?* and tho' I would not undertake to maintain the Affirmative in all points; for why should not our *Souls* be of different Statures and Complexions as well as our *Bodies*? Yet I am thus far of the Opinion, as to think, that no Man's Soul is so unluckily formed, so sunk and immersed in his Body, that it cannot by due care be made to exert it's Faculties, and advanced to a considerable degree of Knowledge. Not that I would therefore conclude, that it is positively in every

every Man's power, provided he uſes his utmoſt Induſtry, to reach what Perfection he pleaſes in any Science. All are not bleſt with the ſame portion of Genius: Nature has viſibly framed and faſhioned ſome Men to particular things; wherein they proceed with a great deal of Eaſe and Delight; the Native Tendency and Propenſion of their Souls concurring with their Diligence and Labour. On the other hand, it is equally difficult, if not impoſſible, to turn the Stream, and be ſucceſsful in ſpight of Nature. Whereof we have a remarkable Inſtance in the Famous *Cicero*, who, tho' he was very fond of Ingenious Men and Writings, and ſpared no

time

time nor pains to have made himſelf as conſiderable a *Poet*, as he was an *Oratour*; yet his Verſes are ſo extreamly Unpoetical, that the Criticks cannot allow him any Title or Pretenſion at all to the Character. And yet we muſt not altogether condemn his Poetical Eſſays, when we conſider what he himſelf ſomewhere ſuggeſts in his own Defence, that ſuch Exerciſes did not only relieve and unbend his Thoughts from ſeverer Studies, but were of great uſe to him in his other Compoſures: They furniſhed him with the knowledge of Figurative Ornaments; *with that fertility of Imagination, and that Beauty of Conception, which is the Mother of Eloquence, and of all that*

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is graceful in Speaking. So that Invention in any kind will turn to ſome Advantage or other; There will either be Pleaſure or Profit, and ſtill the Mind muſt be improved.

But to return. It too often happens, that thoſe who now adayes ſet up for the *Cenſors* of Writings are byaſſed by Partiality; and in ſpight of all their ſpecious Pretences, a ſtrong Tincture of ill Nature and Virulence unhappily appears in every Line. They commonly tell us indeed in their Prefaces, that they have dealt very handſomly and candidly with the Authors they comment upon; and that a *Critick* ought to be as Cautious and Impartial in determining

ning a Man's Reputation, as a *Judge* in the Deciſion of his Fortune. But all this is ſoon forgot: For when we come to the *Remarks* themſelves, we are entertained with nothing but continual Snarling and Inſolence. The poor Writer is uſed moſt inhumanely for the ill Cadence of a Verſe, or the Ruggedneſs of a Period: And if by chance he has offended againſt any of the ſmalleſt Precepts of *Ariſtotle*, &c. then to be ſure, there is no Mercy nor Quarter for him. The little Lapſes of a Pen, and ſometimes the *Errata* of the Preſs, cannot be paſſed by without a ſtrange Diſguſt and and Severe Reprimand. And rather than not ſwell up his Annotations to a juſt Volume, this

this mild, inoffenſive, good natured Creature, will acquit his Conſcience, and fall foul upon the Author's Morals; will give us an account of his Religion, Eſtate, and Pedigree; or if he has the leaſt Reaſon to ſuſpect his Friend has none, he is very free in diſcloſeing that Secret too. I am ſorry ſome Pieces lately written on good Subjects, and by good Hands, (which I forbear to Name) have fallen under this Cenſure, and for want of a prudent Conduct have loſt a great part of that Reputation they might otherwiſe have juſtly claimed. Thus Criticiſm dwindles into down right Raillery and Aſperſion, and we muſt take it, as we find it, a Compoſition of a great

great deal of Dogmatical Arrogance and ill Nature mingled with a very little Wit and Diſcernment; which is the Reaſon it has ſo ſmall Effect upon thoſe *Scriblers* who every day crowd the Preſs with their ſenſeleſs Productions. But if Critical Writers would lay aſide their private Piques; and employ themſelves only in purſuing the main Buſineſs of their Art, *The Reformation and Finiſhment of Letters*, they would prove extraordinary Members in the Common-Wealth of Learning. But 'till Men will diveſt themſelves of the prevailing Affections of Humanity, this Candor and Ingenuity is rather to be wiſhed for than expected. Not that I would here be ſuppoſed

to

to insinuate, that the present Age hath not actually produced Men of as Considerable Abilities and accurate Learning, as any other Age of the World. For never did Men follow Reason with more steddiness, nor prosecute their Studies to greater Purpose and Advantage, than at this day; as might be proved from several instances not only in the *more abstruse Sciences*, but in those of *Humanity* too, had not the Argument been sufficiently controverted already by some Modern Criticks both of this and our Neighbour Nations.

But I promised to give you my Opinion of some late Books. I will begin first with *Mr.* Wotton's *Reflections on Antient and Modern*

Modern Learning, which he has reprinted not long ſince with Amendments and Additions. I ſhall not enter into the Merits of the Cauſe with him, or pretend to anſwer his Elaborate Work in an haſty Diſſertation. For his Deſign of giving the World an Hiſtory of Learning, is doubtleſs a very Uſeful and Commendable Undertaking; and I think he has in General, choſen the better ſide of the Argument. My Intention is only to conſider curſorily his manner of handling it; and this, I doubt, will not appear ſo Generous as the Deſign it ſelf. He, has you know, oppoſed *Sir William Temple*, one of the moſt Gentlemanly Writers of our Age and Nation;

tion; but not with ſo much Reſpect and Decency as became either his own, or Sir *William's* Character. I cannot imagine what Reaſon he had for it; unleſs he thought it might be ſome Honour to him, if he could provoke (tho' rudely) ſo worthy an Antagoniſt to enter the Liſts with him. But he was unluckily diſappointed in that part of his Deſign, and has therefore in this Second Edition retracted many of thoſe undervaluing Criticiſms, that are too frequently urged and inſiſted upon in the firſt. But as to the Book it ſelf. It ſeems Mr. *Wotton* was engaged by ſome Friends, or Patrons, to try what could be ſaid in Defence of Modern Learning, againſt that

of the Ancients. Upon which account he found himſelf obliged to Conſider, who had appeared on the other ſide. And therefore, leaſt he ſhould be accuſed of betraying his Cauſe, proclaims open War againſt Sir *William Temple*, for having written an *Eſſay* in Honour of the Ancients. In order to ſubdue this popular Adverſary, he nicely examines every Word that ſeems diſagreeable to his own Notions; and, leaſt any thing ſhould be wanting to compleat his Victory, quarrels with him about inſignificant Trifles wholly forreign to his Point. Any other Man would have thought it ſufficient to have refuted the Arguments in general, without citeing and referring ſo particularly

cularly to almoſt every Line. But then Mr. *Wotton* had loſt his End; it was his Buſineſs to attack Sir *William Temple*. And therefore he begins his Book like a good Diſputant, with *General Reflections on the ſtate of the Queſtion; then proceeds to examine his Hypotheſis*, and talks much *of inquiring into the particular points, that ariſe from his General Propoſitions; of controverting his Arguments; of uſing proper Mediums; of reaſoning ſeverely*, &c. Who, upon reading this, would not imagine our *Reflecter* had ſome knotty Syllogiſtical Piece to deal with; and was at leaſt ſupporting the Reformation and Church of *England* againſt a Second *Bellarmine*? But all this mighty Buſtle is how to con-

ſute an *Eſſay*; which is ſo far from being penned in a Scholaſtick or Polemical Way, that it is writ (as all this Author's Works are, and as all *Eſſays* certainly ought to be) in the moſt eaſie unaffected Style imaginable. Which is more than I can ſay of Mr. *Wotton*'s Book; for (tho' I read it with no manner of Prejudice, but with a deſire only of being pleaſed and informed) it appears to me to be done in a ſtiff artificial manner. There is indeed a *Flowingneſs of fine Language, and Rapidity of ſmooth Numbers and Periods*; but then the ſame dance and chime of Words is eternally ſounding in one's Ears, and the ſame fine Expreſſions brought in over and over again,

and

and affected even to an Impropriety; the moſt nauſeous Entertainment a Reader can have. For *We love Variety; and the beſt Expreſſions, as well as Things, conſtantly reiterated will certainly diſguſt.* But this may look very odd, (eſpecially to the Logical Reaſoning Mr. *Wotton*) *to aſſert all, and prove nothing*; and yet I am reſolved neither to trouble you nor my ſelf with quoteing his Book, which would be the only way, I know of, to prove any thing for or againſt his Style. I muſt therefore appeal to your own Judicious Taſte for the Truth of what I ſay; and in the mean time I will venture to *aſſert* one thing further, *viz.* That whatever becomes of Sir *William Temple's*

Hypotheſis, his *Eſſay* will always be read with more *Pleaſure*, than Mr. *Wotton*'s *Reflections* with *Profit*. For, notwithſtanding all his mighty Pomp and Boaſt of much Reading, if we come to examine what Diſcoveries he has made, what new Lights he hath given the World on this Subject, I believe we ſhall find nothing, that was not well known before to any Man of the leaſt acquaintance with Letters. And if he was as conſiderable, as he thinks himſelf, that is, ſo conſiderable as to repreſent the Learning of the preſent Age, theſe *Reflections* might very well be alledged againſt him by thoſe of the Oppoſite Party, and ſilence him at once. Perhaps you may fancy

fancy by this General Diſlike, that I am byaſſed in my Opinion, but I aſſure you what I have ſaid is my real Judgment, which tho' it may be miſtaken, is however Impartial. I have no Deſign of gaining Sir *W. Temple*'s Favour, or incurring Mr. *Wotton*'s Diſpleaſure. I only take the Liberty (which all Authors muſt allow their Readers) of ſpeaking my Thoughts freely, and as ſuch I offer them to You.

I have now done with Mr. *Wotton*, and am come to his Friend Dr. *Bentley*. Who has for ſome Reaſons beſt known to himſelf, not only engaged a ſingle Gentleman, but a whole Society, upon a much leſs important Argument than

that of *Antient and Modern Learning*; viz. Whether those *Epistles* and *Fables* commonly ascribed to *Phalaris* and *Æsop*, &c. be truly genuine or not? The Debate is now depending; and, however insignificant You and I may take it to be, is prosecuted with as much Heat and Contention on both sides, as if some Article of Eternal Life was immediately concerned in it. I shall not presume to interpose one word in so hot a Dispute; only as a Stander-by I may be allowed to give my Sentiments of their Behaviour that manage it. First then, The Ground of the Quarrel is generally looked upon as highly ridiculous on the *Dr's.* part, even allowing the matter

matter of Fact to be juſt as he himſelf has ſtated it. For there was no ſuch keen *Sting* in the Words he reſents, [viz. *collatas etiam* (ſc. Epiſtolas) *cum MS°. in Bibliothecâ Regiâ, cujus mihi copiam ulteriorem Bibliothecarius pro ſingulari ſuâ humanitate negavit*] that could have provoked any diſcreet or ſenſible Man, whoſe time did not lye upon his hands, to write a Long and Laboured Diſſertation (on a Subject widely remote from his Profeſſion, and of little or no advantage at all to any other part of the Learned World,) that he might have a proper Opportunity of retaliating upon his Adverſaries. But if he denied Mr. *Boyl* the King's Manuſcript in ſo rude a manner,

as

as is pretended on the other ſide; I think Mr. *Boyl* was ſo far from being the *Aggreſſor*, that he was obliged in his *own Defence*, to give the World ſome Reaſon why it was not collated; and he could not ſay leſs than he did in his Preface. This is my Opinion of the beginning of this Controverſie: But the *Dr.* perhaps knew better how to apply the Reflection than I do; and had therefore Reaſon not to brook it. But before he could conveniently retort this bitter unpardonable Irony, he found it neceſſary to complement Mr. *Boyl* out of his Title to the Edition of *Phalaris*; that he might clear his way to ſome other *Gentlemen* he had a greater mind to be dealing with,

and

and fix the Affront (as he pretends) where it ought to be. All this while Mr. *Boyl* is made a Child and a Tool of, to ſerve theſe malicious Ends. He is a *Thing* of great hopes, and as ſuch the *Dr.* ſays he is willing to encourage him. But is ſo far from looking upon him as a ſuitable Antagoniſt, that out of his great Goodneſs and Condeſcenſion he offers by way of Tutor, to give him a clearer View into the Depths and Secrets of Learning, than thoſe Ignorant Pretenders, under whoſe Care he was bred, have been able to do. The Style of this Book is as remarkable for it's *Roughneſs* and *Operoſeneſs*, as *Mr. Wotton*'s for its *Flowingneſs*. But inſtead of venturing to Criticize upon it,

it, I have here rather chose to Transcribe a few Lines, which may serve to give you a small taste of the Man as well as the Book. In the Prelude to this grand Dispute he looks bigg, and says, *Phalaris has the Plea and Right of Possession, and I shall not go to dispossess him, as those have done before me, by an Arbitrary Sentence in his own Tyrannical way; but proceed with him upon lawful Evidence, and a fair impartial Tryal. And I am very much mistaken in the nature and force of my Proofs, if ever any Man that reads them persist in his old Opinion of making* Phalaris *an Author.* After he has quite confounded the *Epistles*, he proceeds to his Triumph over the *Late Edition*; and gives an Account

count of his own Extraordinary Character and Learning, in the following Words. *Pro ſingulari ſuâ humanitate! I could produce ſeveral Letters from Learned Profeſſors abroad, whoſe Books our Editors may in time be fit to read; wherein theſe very ſame words are ſaid of me candidly and ſeriouſly. For I endeavour to oblige even Forreigners by all Courteſie and Humanity; much more would I encourage and aſſiſt any uſeful Deſigns at home. And I heartily wiſh I could do any ſervice to that young Gentleman of great hopes, whoſe Name is ſet to the Edition. I can do him no greater at preſent, than to remove ſome blemiſhes from the Book, which is aſcribed to him; which I deſire may be taken aright, to be no Diſparagement to himſelf, but a*

Re-

Reproof only to his Teachers, &c. While I write this, I cannot but fancy it is dictated to me by ſome Haughty School-maſter, with his Rod in his Hand. It has ſuch a ſtrong Tang of that kind of Pride, that no Body elſe could have ſaid it. He profeſſes indeed to diſlike an arbitrary Tyrannical Way of Writing; but has not Skill enough at the ſame time to conceal it in himſelf. But why ſhould I quarrel with the *Dr.* for that which is a fault in his Nature, and which he has as little Inclination as Power to correct? I have nothing more to add, only to aſſure him I am not ſingular in my Sentiments. The ſame Cenſure is paſſed upon his Book by all I have diſcourſed

courſed with about it: And ſome of them were ſuch as had no great Friendſhip for his Adverſaries.

You are by this time probably prepared to expect I ſhould determine in favour of Mr. *Boyl*, (his Quarrel I mean, for I do not interfere with the Argument.) And truly ſo I ſhould, if he had not lately printed a Book in his own Defence; which I will here give you a ſhort touch of: But it muſt be in the ſame ſuperficial manner I have done of the Two Books already diſmiſſed.

This Piece cannot be exempted from as many Faults at leaſt, as have been charged upon the *Drs.*

Dr's. They are indeed Faults of a different kind: The *Dr.* all along entertains his Reader with Insolence and Pedantry; and this Gentleman with School-boy's Jests and little Witticisms. Two Extreams equally distant from fine Satyr; which I the rather mention, because I believe it was more immediately both their Aims, than any true design to Examine the Argument in Debate. But Mr. *Boyl* has in a great measure acknowledged, that this is not his Performance. For he says, he employed some Friends at *Christ-Church*, to consult such Authors as would be of use to him. And I believe the *Wits* of that place could hardly content themselves with dry Citations only, and not be provo-

provoked now and then to exercise the Talent they are so remarkeable for; especially in a Cale that concerned them so nearly. There are many more Reasons to suspect Mr. *Boyl* in this than in the Edition of *Phalaris*. But I shall only hint at such, as will be no Dishonour for him to acquiesce in.

Any one Person certainly would have been quite weary of jesting, before he had swell'd a Book to half this Volume. And as for the Honour of the Quotations, he himself does not contend for it. If I may be permitted to suggest my own Opinion; I fancy this Book was written (as most Publick Compositions in that College are)

by a *Select Club*. There is such a profusion of Wit all along, and such variety of Points and Raillery, that every Man seems to have thrown in a Repartee or so in his turn, and the most Ingenious Dr. *Aldrich* no doubt was at the Head of them, and smoaked and punned plentifully on this Occasion. It brings the old Character of *Christ-Church* very fresh into my Mind; which you may remember distinguished it self from the rest of the *University*, not by its Extraordinary Learning, but its abominable Arrogance. Methinks a little Consideration would have restrained their Fury against Dr. *Bentley*, for being guilty of their own darling Fault; and which the World will justifie him in returning upon

upon them. Pride and Insolence are certainly as allowable in him, who is a Scholar, as in some young Men, who cannot reasonably be supposed to be so. Not that I would justifie such a Character in any Man of twice Dr. *Bentley*'s Learning; for he has made himself ridiculous by it, as I have observed before. But I would very fain know what Prerogative some People have of sanctifying it in themselves, when they *have naturally such Scorn and Contempt for it in others.* The Dean, instead of checking this intolerable Temper, encourages and promotes it by his own worthy Example. It is not long since he published a small *Compendium of Logick*, for the

Uſe of Mr. *Boyl*, (upon which account I name it,) wherein he gives a Specimen of his haughty Dogmatical Humour, and takes all Opportunities of inveighing very warmly againſt the Author of *L' Art de Penſer*, a moſt ingenious and uſeful Writer. He makes nothing of calling him Coxcomb, Fool, and Blockhead, for dareing to diſſent from *Ariſtotle*, and for preſumeing to advance any thing New, upon a Subject that great Man had quite exhauſted ſo many Ages before him. One would imagine that this learned *Dr.* had done his Maſter *Stagyrite* ſome Notable Service. But his Book is only an Epitome of *Sanderſon*, and one of the worſt, moſt obſcure Epitome's

tome's I ever read. He has forſooth endeavoured to turn *Sanderſon*'s plain intelligible Language into terſe polite Latin: Which *Sanderſon* could have done as well as he, had he not induſtriouſly avoided it, and with good reaſon. For he knew, if the Phraſe was too laboured, the Rules would ſtill become more obſcure; and the Student conſequently perplexed with an unneceſſary Pomp and Ornament of Style. But this will be no Fault, when the preſent Controverſie comes to be turned into Latin.

Pedantry is another thing, which they have ſeverely branded Dr. *Bentley* with. But this too might have been ſpared

as well as his Insolence, and upon the same Account. For it is as errant a sign of Pedantry to spend ones Time in publishing bad Editions of Old Authors, and to be highly sollicitous about the various Readings of them, which former Editions have only neglected, because they were insignificant; as to *affect the Use of hard words, and to lard English Writings with Greek and Latin.* I think Dr. *Aldrich* is pretty Notorious at present, for imploying his young unexperienced Students this way. He betrayed Mr. *Boyl* into the impertinent Controversie he and his Friends are now engaged in; and is still involving others in the Quarrel. We have lately had an Edition of some of

Æsop's

Æsop's (or, as they are called, *Æsopical*) *Fables*, in the Preface to which, the young Editor, with a Pertneſs peculiar to that College, has made a very ſlighting mention of Dr. *Bentley*. Such a one as I think the *Dean* ought to have retrenched upon the ſcore of good Breeding; a thing they ſo frequently exact from others. But inſtead of that, I find in another Book publiſhed laſt Week, called *Examen Poeticum Duplex*, &c. that he has ſuffered ſome of his College to make Sport with him in their Occaſional Compoſitions. Amongſt other things, ſome Body has endeavoured his Character in two Epigrams, one of which I have here tranſcribed for You. I am

assured they were made in *Christ-Church*, and either by the Dean himself, or a Brother *Doctor* at least.

Intellectus agens illuminat phantasmata.

Ad R. B. *Bibliothecarium philocriticum.*

Quidam acer doctusq; (ipsi si credere possis)
Scriptorum judex, & benè notus homo,
Dum terit assiduè chartas, rigidiq; magistri
Argutum examen vocula quæque subit ;

Sævit

Sævit, atrox impunè hinc inde minantia vibrat
Arma, ferus calamo, nec minùs ungue ferus.
Arbiter ipſe unus : Quippe hic mihi perplacet Author,
Sit ſacer ; ille mihi diſplicet, intereat.
Ille idem mancis reddit ſua membra Poetis,
Siqua dies rapuit longa, vel ignis edax.
Quicquid Ariſtotelis Gellive *intercidit, illi*
Tam notum, quàm qui proſtat ubique liber.
Prævidet ille etiam ſeclô ſcribenda futuro,
Et nondum natum mente revolvit opus.

Bacchetum *aſpexti? minimè, nec curo; neceſſe eſt*
Hæc fari, haud aliter aſcribere, novi hominem.
Quàm deliri vis eſt fœcunda cerebri!
Quid non ingenii vivida flamma poteſt?
Te præbente facem pellucent, Mome, tenebræ,
Splendorem fumus, ſomnia pondus habent.

Another Gentleman, of the ſame College, has ſtrained hard in a Poem, intitled *Articuli Pacis*, to bring in a ſmart Verſe upon him, *viz.*

Anglo-Græco-Latino-crepundia Bentleiana.

But

But it may be ſome Satisfaction to the *Dr.* that theſe are by no means the beſt Copies in the Collection. I have juſt read it over, and becauſe I know you have a Value for ſuch things, will ſend it you (with thoſe Books you mentioned) by the firſt Opportunity. I think I cannot make a better Preſent of the kind.

But I had almoſt forgot what an Acquaintance of ours has often ſaid upon this Argument, in Oppoſition to Dr. *Bentley*, *that if he had had either good Manners or good Senſe, he would never have haſtily fallen upon a Learned Body, that was ſo very able to juſtifie it ſelf, and to confound him, it being the moſt*

moſt likely way to make a Shipwreck of the little Reputation he had got. In Anſwer to this, (for you ſee I have changed ſides, and as the Caſe now ſtands, am entirely for the *Dr.*) I have already confeſſed it my Opinion, that he was too forward in provoking the Diſpute, and that he engaged himſelf in a great deal of unneceſſary Trouble when he did it. But I cannot agree with our Friend in my Reaſons why I think ſo. For he would have the College a Match infinitely above Dr. *Bentley*; whereas I think, that part of it which was at firſt concerned was rather below him, and upon that Account the *Dr.* ſhould have been ſilent. He repreſents them as too formidable

midable a Society for any ſingle Perſon to encounter, without *Shipwrecking his Reputation*, tho' he has the Truth on his ſide. But a Multitude is not always terrible, becauſe it thinks it ſelf ſo. Dr. *Bentley* knew well enough the World had no ſuch Opinions of them, and that both his Character and Argument would ſtand ſecure againſt all the weak Efforts they could make; which I fancy was one great Reaſon of his being too warm in his firſt Reſentments. I hear he has now prepared an Anſwer to their Book, which I much wonder at. For the Abuſive Part of it is ſo blunt and ungenteel, that it does not affect his Reputation at all; and the Authorities in the other are

ſo

ſo falſly cited and miſapplied, that they anſwer themſelves: In my little Reading, I can perceive ſeveral Miſtakes, and I doubt not but the Dr. and others, who are more converſant in ſuch Authors, are able to detect many more. But if I might adviſe both Parties, they ſhould employ their Time and Pains upon ſome more Uſeful Subject. There has been too much Duſt raiſed about this already.

Thus, *Sir*, you ſee, by ſtriving to ſay a great deal in ſo narrow a Compaſs and ſhort a Time, I have ſcarce ſaid any thing; I have but juſt named thoſe Topicks, that ſhould have been minutely conſidered, to

have

have done the Subject right, rather propoſing all along than proving my Opinions, which I ſubmit to your better Judgment. And I hope you will put the moſt Favourable Conſtruction upon my Endeavours, if I have been more willing than able to Obſerve your Commands.

I am

SIR,

Yours, &c.

T. R.

In *page* 13. *line* 7. r. *made by their*